

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**SENT TO D.C.**

7-2-07

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name : **Palmer Park**

other names/site number : **Park No. 13**

**2. Location**

street & number: **201 E. 111<sup>th</sup> Street (location and mailing address)** \_\_\_\_\_ Not for publication

city or town : **Chicago** \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity

state **Illinois** code **IL** county **Cook** code **031** zip code **60628**

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this \_\_\_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant \_\_\_\_\_ nationally \_\_\_\_\_ statewide \_\_\_\_\_ locally. ( \_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Illinois Historic Preservation Agency**  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria. ( \_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

\_\_\_\_\_  
American Indian Tribe

**Palmer Park**  
Name of Property

**Cook County, Illinois**  
County and State

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**4. National Park Service Certification**

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I, hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other (explain):	_____	_____

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**5. Classification**

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Ownership of Property  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private  
 public-local  
 public-State  
 public-Federal

Category of Property  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)  
 district  
 site  
 structure  
 object

Number of Resources within Property  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>  3  </u>	<u>  1  </u>	buildings
<u>  2  </u>	<u>  2  </u>	sites
<u>  3  </u>	<u>  4  </u>	structures
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  1  </u>	objects
<u>  8  </u>	<u>  8  </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register      **N/A**

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

**Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District**

**Palmer Park**  
Name of Property

**Cook County, Illinois**  
County and State

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

**LANDSCAPE/ park**  
**RECREATION AND CULTURE/ outdoor recreation**  
**RECREATION AND CULTURE/ sports facility**  
**OTHER/ field house**

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

**LANDSCAPE/ park**  
**RECREATION AND CULTURE/ outdoor recreation**  
**RECREATION AND CULTURE/ sports facility**  
**OTHER/ field house**

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Beaux Arts Classicism**

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation: **CONCRETE**

Roof : **ASPHALT TILES**

Walls: **CONCRETE**

Other: **EARTH**  
**VEGETATION**

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Palmer Park**  
Name of Property

**Cook County, Illinois**  
County and State

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### 8. Statement of Significance

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Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

**Entertainment/ Recreation**

**Social History**

**Architecture**

**Landscape Architecture**

Period of Significance: **1905 - 1957** Significant Dates: **N/A**

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above): **N/A**

Cultural Affiliation **N/A**

Architect/Builder: **Burnham, D.H & Company**  
**Olmsted Brothers**

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.) **See Continuation Sheet**

**Palmer Park**  
Name of Property

**Cook County, Illinois**  
County and State

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository **Chicago Park District**

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**10. Geographical Data**

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Acreage of Property: **40.48 acres**

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing    Zone Easting Northing

1 16 448972 4615615 3 16 448581 4615219

2 16 448972 4615219 4 16 448581 4615615

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**See Continuation Sheet**

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**See Continuation Sheet**

**Palmer Park**  
Name of Property

**Cook County, Illinois**  
County and State

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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name/title: Julia Sniderman Bachrach

organization: Chicago Park District

date: December 5, 2006

street & number: 541 N. Fairbanks

telephone: (312) 742-4698

city or town: Chicago

state: IL

zip code: 60611

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**Additional Documentation**

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

**Maps**

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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**Property Owner**

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(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name **Timothy J. Mitchell, General Superintendent, Chicago Park District**

street & number **541 North Fairbanks**

telephone

city or town **Chicago**

state **IL**

zip code **60611**

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**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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Palmer Park, Cook County, Illinois

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**Narrative Description**

Conceived as part of a revolutionary system of fourteen parks in 1903, Palmer Park was originally known as Park No. 13. The innovative new parks were conceived by South Park Commission General Superintendent J. Frank Foster and designed by the prominent firms, Olmsted Brothers landscape architects, and D.H. Burnham & Co. architects. Palmer Park consists of sixteen resources: eight contributing and eight non-contributing. The contributing resources include three buildings, three structures and two sites consisting of an oval running track, the athletic field, plantings, walkways, and other landscape elements..

The South Park Commission completed construction in August of 1905, and dedicated Palmer Park on October 9, 1905. By the end of that fall, a total of ten south side small parks provided recreational, social, and educational opportunities to hundreds of thousands of people in Chicago, as well as a new prototype for the design and programming of neighborhood parks throughout the nation.

Over the years, Palmer Park has continuously adapted to the frequently changing needs of the surrounding community while retaining a high level of integrity. The property retains a great deal of fabric dating from its period of significance, and is primarily composed of contributing features. In order to describe Palmer Park clearly and to show that it retains sufficient integrity to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the following plans and attachments are submitted as part of this nomination: a South Park Commission plan of 1909 that represents the original Olmsted Brothers Plan [A], a South Park Commission Plan of 1909 that shows what was originally realized [B], a Chicago Park District plan of 1936 [C], and a plot plan from the 1980s [D], and a recent color aerial photograph [E].

Palmer Park is bounded on the north by East 111<sup>th</sup> Street, on the south by East 113<sup>th</sup> Street, on the east by South Martin Luther King Drive and the west by South Indiana Avenue. The 40.5-acre site is located in the Roseland community area. Settled by Dutch families in the 1850s, it was named Roseland in 1873 by James H. Bowen, president of the Calumet and Chicago Canal and Dock Company in honor of the "tidy village with its beautiful flowers."<sup>1</sup> By the late 1880s, George Pullman's famous Palace Car Company and its surrounding company town, abutted the east side of Roseland, and many of the English, Irish, German and Swedish immigrants who lived in the area worked at the Pullman factory. After annexation of the entire area to the City of Chicago in 1889, other industries moved into the area. By the turn of the century, residents of the area were in dire need for breathing space and social services. The South Park Commissioners responded by selecting the Roseland site in 1903 as one of fourteen proposed new parks of the innovative small parks initiative. The commissioners hired the Olmsted Brothers landscape architects and D.H. Burnham & Co. architects to design all of the proposed parks including Park No. 13, which later became known as Palmer Park.

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<sup>1</sup> Janice L. Reiff, "Roseland," *Encyclopedia of Chicago History*, The University of Chicago Press, 2004, 722.

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**Palmer Park, Cook County, Illinois**

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Although some of the Olmsted Brothers preliminary plans for Park No. 13 (Palmer Park) placed the field house complex in one corner of the park on a diagonal axis with the sunken playfield, the commissioners had suggested that the location should be changed and that the buildings should face either south or west. In the final plans [A] the Olmsted Brothers placed the field house [1] complex on the north side of the park facing west. The 1909 plan shows the architectural complex as it was originally built [B]. The building complex is composed of the field house [1] and the fitness center [2]. Historically, the field house [1] included the assembly hall, club rooms, and a women's gymnasium. The building now used as a fitness center and dance studio originally served as a men's gymnasium [2].

Designed by D.H. Burnham & Company, the field house [1] and original men's gymnasium [2] were both rendered in a classical Beaux Arts Style. They are composed of exposed aggregate concrete, a material that is sometimes referred to as "marblecrete," or "popcorn concrete." The field house [1] is rectangular in plan. It is composed of a two-story building with a gabled roof on the east, and a one-and-a-half story wing with a hipped roof on the west. The entire structure originally had a clay tile roof, with overhanging eaves. The west wing originally had skylights. The entire roof was re-clad with asbestos shingles in the 1930s, and replaced again more recently with green asphalt shingles.

The north and south façades of the two-story part of the field house [1] are very similar, with five segmental arched openings capped by terra cotta scrolls. Each of the arched openings is divided by pairs of fluted pilasters capped with terra cotta scrolls within simple terra cotta roundels. At the upper story, flanking each of the arched openings, there is a diagonal scored pattern in the concrete. Originally the south façade's arched openings contained double doors, sidelights, and transom lights with divided muntins and mullions. (The north façade had similar fenestration, but with windows instead of doors.) In the 1920s and 1930s, both façades were altered to enclose the first-story openings with stucco to match the concrete. A double door was installed in the center arch of the south facade. In later years the Chicago Park District placed small aluminum boxes around the terra cotta details over the pilasters and keystones over the arches as a pigeon control measure. The west wing's north and south façades retain their original fenestration, which was composed of bays of triple windows that have a union jack motif. Each bay is divided by a simple, unadorned pilaster. Historically, the west façade had a single band of the union jack windows; however, these were filled-in during the late 1930s.

The field house retains many attractive interior features such as original brick pavers in the lobby, an ornamental handrail along the stairs, and classical elements incised into the concrete. In the gymnasium there are three murals that were completed and signed by James E. McBurney in 1934. The first mural features a Potawatomi Indian viewing the surrounding landscape. Joliet and Marquette, the French missionaries who explored the area that became Chicago in the 1670s, are depicted in the second mural along with a Native American guide in a canoe. The third mural is the scene of Dutch settlers holding farming implements in front of their home. The murals are scheduled for conservation work.



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**Palmer Park, Cook County, Illinois**

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The original men's gymnasium [2] is now the park's fitness center and dance studio. Composed of exposed aggregate concrete, the building is rectangular in plan. It is two stories in height, with a one story wing at its north façade. The building has a hipped roof, with a shed-like slope extending along the north side. Like the field house, the building's original clay tile roof is now composed of asphalt shingles. The building is similar in appearance to the west wing of the field house with triple windows in a union jack motif divided by simple pilasters along its south facade

The two buildings [1 and 2] sit on a raised terrace with steps leading down to the ground level [3]. Originally, an elegant set of stairs extended across from the eastern part of the field house to the men's gymnasium. The Olmsted Brothers intended to link the two buildings together with an open pergola [A]. This structure was never built. Instead, there is an open area composed of crushed gravel, with an original concrete wall at the north that enclosed the swimming pool area. The 1909 plan shows two formal rows of trees on the terrace between the buildings [B]. These were planted as a monoculture of elm trees, which likely succumbed to Dutch elm disease in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1970, the Chicago Park District paved over the terrace with asphalt. In the early 1980s, the original elm trees were removed and some honey locusts planted on the terrace [3]. The original stairway that extended along the terrace was removed in the late 1930s, and replaced with four shorter sets of stairs. In more recent years, a concrete ramp was built along the edge of the terrace near the field house.

The outdoor swimming pool [4] is located just north of the terrace area. Historically, there were large sand courts at the north and south end of the swimming pool and outdoor changing booths to the west. Those features are no longer extant, and there is a small parking lot [5] where the booths were historically located. The swimming pool has been repaired and updated, and the concrete decking around the pool has been replaced several times over the years. In the fall of 2006, the Chicago Park District began construction on a new water slide for the swimming pool. The pool [4] is a contributing feature, however, because it remains in its original location and maintains its spatial relationships with the other historic features in the area. The concrete walls that historically enclosed the swimming pool area were replaced with metal picket fencing.

At the northeast corner of the swimming pool complex is the original boiler house [6]. This is a rectangular building with a flat roof composed of exposed aggregate concrete. This structure had a large chimney stack, which has been removed. The three windows on the south façade facing the swimming pool area have been filled in and the surface used for a children's mosaic mural project. Today, the boiler house is used as the park's crafts and ceramics building.

The area west of the swimming pool and north of the field house was the original women's open air gymnasium and children's playground [7]. The women's area, which once had outdoor gymnastics apparatus, is now an open field [8]. To the west, the current soft surface playground is located at the site of the original children's playground [9]. Historically, the area had an oval-shaped wading pool, a rectangular sand court, and playground equipment. In 1986, the Chicago Park District demolished the oval wading pool and replaced it with a modern circular spray pool. The playground was updated several times over the years. The existing soft surface playground was constructed in 1991.

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**Palmer Park, Cook County, Illinois**

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The area east of the swimming pool was the original men's open air gymnasium. Historically, this area included an oval running track [10] and outdoor gymnastics apparatus. In the 1910s or 1920s, a handball [11] court was installed at the west side of the interior portion of the running track. This was removed in recent years, and in 2007 the Chicago Park District will install batting cages at this location. Two sets of basketball courts were constructed in this area in the 1980s [12, 13]. One of them [12] is east of the original handball court and the other is located just south of the oval running track [13]. The cinder oval track [10] is no longer maintained; however, its form is currently still perceptible. In recent years, a much longer second jogging trail [14] was added. Composed of compacted pink crushed gravel, this track runs alongside the original track, crosses over to the edge of the athletic field, and extends along the perimeter of the entire park.

The park's walkway system helps define its overall design. The Olmsted Brothers created a formal double walk that extended east to west adjacent to the architectural complex [14]. Historically, these walkways extended into two areas that were circular in plan at the east and west ends [15, 16]. At the west end, this was originally a music court that was formally planted with elm trees [15]. This circular area was likely originally composed of crushed gravel. In 1970, it was re-paved with asphalt. The elm trees died, and in 1985. They were replaced by ash trees and honey locusts planted in two concentric rings. There is sod in the center of the circular area.

At the east end, the double walkway [14] originally led to a large circular wading pool, edged by a circular walkway [16]. This large pool had a concrete basin. This feature was used for wading, fly casting instruction, model boats, and water carnival events. It remained in place until 1985, when the Park District razed the original concrete structure. The area was filled in and planted with concentric rings of ash and honey locusts to match the music court area. The area around the new trees was paved in asphalt.

In the middle of the double walk on axis with the center of the terrace [3] between the field house and men's gymnasium, there is a planting bed that is circular in plan. This area has a flag pole in the center [17]. It is surrounded by sod and shrub plantings. The circular area was originally planned as a fountain; however, it was never installed. Instead, it was a flower bed for much of the site's history. The flag pole was installed in 1960. There was an *American Doughboy* monument installed near this area in 1922. The sculpture, which was created by John Paulding, was stolen in the 1980s, and the base has been removed.

The north side of the double walkway [14] joins with a U-shaped walkway [18] that curves around the park's athletic field. Several secondary walkways form triangular configurations extending from the u-shaped walkway [19] to the outer walkway along the edge of the park. The entire system of walkways follows its original configuration. Today, they are paved with asphalt. There are many historic trees edging the walk, however, the historic formality of the plantings along the primary U-shaped walkway is only evident in certain stretches.

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**Palmer Park, Cook County, Illinois**

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The athletic field [20] slopes down from the U-shaped walk. Historically, the sunken field was flooded to provide ice skating in the wintertime. The field remains recessed today. There are two groupings of tennis courts located on the north side of the athletic field [21, 22]. The one on the east is a combination of tennis and handball courts. Tennis has been played at this site since the park's early history. Tennis courts are shown on the 1909 plan [B], but these may have been areas for lawn tennis without paved courts. Historic plans show that year-round netting was installed in 1910, and by 1923 there were paved courts enclosed with wire fencing. Although the courts have been repaved and the fencing has been replaced over the years, these features retain their historic locations and convey their historic appearance. Thus, they are contributing features.

On the eastern perimeter of the park, flanking 112<sup>th</sup> Street is the park's maintenance service yard [23] Located on its original site the service yard is enclosed by a brick wall. The original maintenance building and service yard wall were composed of exposed aggregate concrete similar to other architectural elements in the park. In 1962, the original building was demolished and replaced with a building constructed of concrete blocks. In 1977, the Chicago Park District removed the original concrete wall and constructed a new brick wall to enclose the area. At the time, the 1962 building was also renovated.

Palmer Park suffers from deterioration and some insensitive repairs and alterations. Despite this, the park retains good integrity. The location of features, spatial relationships, architectural elements, many early plantings, alignment of walkways, sunken athletic field, and much historic fabric remains intact. The field house retains many fine interior features, including the three murals. The small neighborhood park has provided the surrounding community with athletic, educational, and social programs for more than a century. Despite the alterations, Palmer Park strongly conveys its historic character and retains sufficient integrity to warrant listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

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**Palmer Park, Cook County, Illinois**

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**Contributing Features**

**Non-contributing Features**

**Buildings**

Field House [1]  
Gymnasium Building [2]  
Boiler Room House [6]

Maintenance Building/ Yard [23]

**Sites**

Landscape (including music court [16]  
Athletic Field [20] and Walkways [8, 14, 19])  
Oval Running Track [10]

Jogging trail  
Parking Lot [5]

**Structures**

Swimming Pool [4]  
2 -Tennis courts [21,22]

Spray pool [9]  
Playground [7]  
2- Basketball courts [12, 13]

**Objects**

Flag pole [17]

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**Palmer Park, Cook County, Illinois**

**Statement of Significance**

Palmer Park meets Criterion A and Criterion C for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The property is nationally significant as part of the revolutionary plan by the South Park Commission in the early twentieth century to provide breathing spaces with recreational facilities and social services to the densely populated tenement districts within its jurisdiction. In addition to the innovative programming, the design of the new parks by D.H. Burnham & Co. architects and the Olmsted Brothers landscape architects influenced the development of small neighborhood parks throughout the country.

The South Park Commissioners began efforts to create a system of fourteen new parks in 1903. Ten of the proposed parks, including Palmer Park, opened in 1905, quickly influencing the design and programming of other parks throughout the nation. In fact, in 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt recommended that park administrators throughout America should "... see the magnificent system that Chicago has erected in its south park section, one of the most notable civic achievements in any American city."<sup>2</sup>

Palmer Park qualifies for listing on the National Register under the multiple documentation form, "The Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District." The property is nationally significant during the period from 1905, when construction commenced, to 1957, the current fifty-year cut-off date for the National Register of Historic Places. The property is significant in the following areas: Entertainment/ Recreation, Social History, Architecture, and Landscape Architecture.

The South Park Commission was one of three park systems established in 1869 to create a series of parks and boulevards that would encircle Chicago. As explained in section E (page 3) of the multiple property nomination form "The Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District," the South Park Commission served a geographic region spanning from the Chicago River south to 138<sup>th</sup> Street and from Lake Michigan west to Cicero Avenue. Its jurisdiction included the towns of South Chicago, Lake, and Hyde Park. Its original parkland consisted of South Park (later renamed Jackson and Washington Parks and the Midway Plaisance) and boulevards linking the park to downtown and the West Park System.

By the late 1890s, the South Park Commissioners were concerned that the existing parkland could no longer satisfy the needs of all of the people they served. The city had experienced tremendous industrial growth and the population was surging. In 1869, when Chicago's original park commissions were formed, the city's population was 300,000. By 1900, that figure had increased to 1.7 million, and at that time nearly 750,000 people resided a mile away or farther from any park.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> As reprinted in South Park Commission, *Report of the South Park Commissioners For a Period of Fifteen Months from December 1, 1906 to February 29, 1908, inclusive*. Chicago: 1908, 62.

<sup>3</sup> Dwight Heald Perkins, *Report of the Special Park Commission to the City Council of Chicago on the Subject of a Metropolitan Park System*. Chicago: 1904, 39.

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**Palmer Park, Cook County, Illinois**

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Aware of the deplorable living and working conditions and lack of open spaces in the tenement districts within its jurisdiction, the South Park Commissioners drafted a bill that would empower them to build new parks for the first time in thirty years. The act, approved by the state legislature in 1899, allowed the creation of a new park if it were contiguous to an existing park or boulevard. The following year the South Park Commission acquired a thirty-four-acre site adjacent to a boulevard, Western Avenue, and near the Union Stock Yards. Providing ball fields, swimming and wading lagoons with changing rooms, and playgrounds, the experimental McKinley Park proved to be an immediate success. This prompted the commissioners to begin efforts to create a more ambitious system of neighborhood parks that would provide beautiful landscapes, recreational programs, and social services to the densely populated neighborhoods throughout their district.

The South Park Commission secured enabling legislation in 1901 that would allow it to issue bonds to acquire and improve new parks. This law stipulated that proposed parks could not be more than ten acres in size. In 1902, the commissioners brought the proposal to a public referendum and received strong public support. The following year the commissioners went to the state legislature to amend the 1901 act. The 1903 amendment, known as the Lundberg Act, removed the size limitation, allowed the park commissioners to locate new parks anywhere within their district, and authorized the issuance of bonds. With the legal authority and funding in place, the commission began to plan new parks.

As explained in the multiple property form, South Park Commission Superintendent, J. Frank Foster largely conceived the neighborhood park concept (FIII, p. 11). Foster believed that the new parks could function as neighborhood centers that would uplift and improve the lives of the residents of the overcrowded tenement districts. He suggested that in addition to the ball fields, swimming facilities, and playgrounds that had been tested in McKinley Parks, new parks should also provide a variety of other features. These included separate outdoor gymnasiums for men and women, running tracks, children's sand courts, and a new type of building, the field house. Based on the precedent of Chicago's settlement houses, these innovative park buildings "would provide athletic, educational, recreational programs and social services throughout an entire year."<sup>4</sup> This was particularly useful because Chicago's cold climate had traditionally limited park use to the period between the early spring and late fall.

The South Park Commission hired the Olmsted Brothers landscape architects and D.H. Burnham & Company architects to design the innovative system of fourteen parks. Both firms had a long tradition of working for Chicago's South Park System. The Olmsted Brothers were successors to Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. (1822-1903). Designer of many of the nation's premier parks and landscapes including New York's Central Park and the town of Riverside, Illinois, Olmsted created the original plan for Chicago's South Park in 1871. In 1875, his stepson and nephew, John Charles Olmsted (1852-1920) went into practice with him. Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. laid out the gleaming campus of the World's Columbian Exposition that opened in Jackson Park in 1893. After the fair the firm, then known as Olmsted, Olmsted, and Eliot, transformed the site to back to parkland. In 1898, John Charles and his younger stepbrother, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., formed the Olmsted Brothers firm.

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<sup>4</sup> Julia Sniderman Bachrach, *The City in a Garden: A Photographic History of Chicago's Parks*, Center for American Places, Harrisonburg, VA: 2001, 12.

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After Frederick Law Olmsted Sr.'s death in 1903,, the brothers continued producing plans and landscape designs for thousands of sites throughout the nation.

Daniel H. Burnham (1846 – 1912), Chicago's renowned architect and planner, helped inspire the City Beautiful Movement throughout the nation and the world. Burnham formed an eighteen-year partnership with John Welborn Root in 1873, and the two produced hundreds of buildings and helped develop the Chicago School of Architecture. Burnham & Root designed several buildings for the South Park Commission including the stables and refectory buildings in Washington Park. Root died suddenly in 1891 while deeply involved in planning the World's Columbian Exposition in Jackson Park. Burnham took over preparations for the fair and the firm became known as D.H. Burnham and Company. Burnham and architect Edward H. Bennett (1874-1954) authored the seminal *Plan of Chicago* (1909). Burnham's firm also produced city plans for Cleveland, San Francisco, and Manila.

Early in 1904 both the Olmsted Brothers and D.H. Burnham and Company entered into contracts with the South Park Commission to design the fourteen parks collaboratively. At the time Burnham was awaiting the arrival of Edward Bennett, a young designer from New York who had joined the firm specifically to work on this project. Therefore, the landscape design proceeded ahead of the architecture, with the Olmsted Brothers developing preliminary plans between December 30 and March 1, 1904, even before Bennett arrived and began designing the buildings.<sup>5</sup>

The original plan for a system of fourteen new parks included seven considered squares because they were less than ten acres in size and seven known as small parks because they were larger than ten acres. The design for each of the fourteen parks was to include the program components conceived by Superintendent Foster. In the Olmsted Brothers' initial design recommendations for squares and small parks, they expressed a strong feeling that most, if not all, of the properties should be rendered in a formal idiom. Having designed beautiful large romantic landscapes alongside their father, Frederick Law Olmsted Sr., they were afraid that informal designs on such small sites would become "a petty rendering of what can be far better accomplished in parks many times as large."<sup>6</sup>

The need to fit in all of the program requirements was most challenging in the design of the squares. In order to create a unified and attractive composition that would incorporate such extensive programming, the Olmsted Brothers drew ideas from the emerging fields of city planning and zoning that were particularly taking shape in Europe. A 1903 sketch of a prototypical square reflected the Olmsted Brothers approach to organizing the

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<sup>5</sup> There is an early sketch of Palmer Park entitled Pullman Park by John Charles Olmsted dated December 30, 1903 in the Olmsted Brothers Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division. Also see William W. Tippens and Julia Sniderman, "The Planning and Design of Chicago's Neighborhood Parks," *A Breath of Fresh Air: Chicago's Neighborhood Parks of the Progressive Reform Era 1900-25*, Chicago: The Chicago Public Library and the Chicago Park District, 1989, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Correspondence from Olmsted Brothers to Henry G. Foreman, President of the South Park Commission. December 7, 1903, 11, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division.

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functions within the small sites. In this sketch

all park activities were divided by type of facility needed and placed in different zones of the park. Women's activities were separated from men's. Facilities requiring supervision were clustered along a single edge of the park. The front entry court, children's playground area, running track, wading pool, men's and women's open air gymnasiums, swimming tank, and changing booths were symmetrically arranged around the field house. The remaining portion of the park was devoted to a ball field and areas for passive pursuits.<sup>7</sup>

Walkways edged with trees and shrubbery bordered the ball field and smaller lawn areas, and a concert grove with formally planted trees and a bandstand often flanked the entry to the field house.

In their early recommendations for the entire system of new parks, the Olmsted Brothers asserted that although many of the sites would offer similar accommodations "it would be undesirable to make these playgrounds substantially all alike."<sup>8</sup> They suggested that varying the designs could prove challenging due to the similarities in the characteristics of the sites and program requirements. The solution was often to allow natural characteristics of the site to influence the differences in the designs. When the unimproved site was lower than the surrounding streets, the play field could be depressed. If the surrounding streets were not highly traveled, the play field could be left without walls or fencing. If the neighborhood pedestrian traffic warranted, there could be diagonal paths across the field.

The design and placement of the field house complex also had a major impact on the character of a park and its landscape. Edward H. Bennett served as the principal designer for all the field houses for the new parks. When Bennett joined the project, "he entered an undefined area in architecture."<sup>9</sup> Daniel H. Burnham's firm already had a long and productive relationship with the South Park Commission. Earlier park structures, however, tended to have utilitarian purposes, such as horse stables, or a singular function emphasizing passive recreation, such as a refectory (party-building), and most of these were only open during summer months.

Superintendent J. Frank Foster intended to achieve much more with the new park architecture. Inspired by

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<sup>7</sup> William W. Tippens, "The Olmsted Brothers in the Midwest," *Midwestern Landscape Architecture*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana: 2000, 169.

<sup>8</sup> Correspondence from Olmsted Brothers to Henry G. Foreman, President of the South Park Commission. December 7, 1903, 2, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division..

<sup>9</sup> William W. Tippens and Julia Sniderman, "The Planning and Design of Chicago's Neighborhood Parks," *A Breath of Fresh Air: Chicago's Neighborhood Parks of the Progressive Reform Era 1900-25*, Chicago: The Chicago Public Library and the Chicago Park District, 1989, 24.



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Chicago's settlement house movement, park buildings were intended as vehicles of social reform. The structures would include indoor gymnasiums, allowing for year-round active recreation in the parks for the first time. Clubrooms, auditoriums, and some of the earliest branches of the Chicago Public Library would be included. Various lectures and classes would be provided, making the field houses social and educational centers in the community. There would be locker rooms with showers and swimming pools, offering many tenement district residents their only access to public bathing.

General Superintendent J. Frank Foster and the South Park Commissioners believed that the aesthetics of the park and its architecture could have an important impact on residents living in the filthy, squalid neighborhood surrounding Park No. 13's site, as well as those of the other new parks. According to one architectural critic of the period

the effect of a good building, in which an untrained boy studies or plays, is far more insidious than is that of some imposing, but remote public monuments.... Such surrounding cannot fail in the long run to make for a higher standard of public or private taste.<sup>10</sup>

Like the landscapes, the buildings of the new neighborhood parks all had similar characteristics, but the plans and details were individualized to make each site unique. Bennett varied the architectural design from park to park depending on size, neighborhood context, and landscape design.

Despite the differences in each design, Bennett relied on the same style and materials for all of the parks. Having been trained at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris, Bennett fit well into Burnham's firm that helped inspire the City Beautiful Movement through prominent commissions for monumental buildings and civic plazas throughout the nation. Bennett's park designs echoed the classicism of the World's Columbian Exposition and in fact, in a 1905 article, South Park Commission President Henry Foreman suggested that the neighborhood parks "reflected in miniature the architectural beauty of the White City."<sup>11</sup> Many of the plans for the park architecture involved a complex of buildings organized around an outdoor swimming pool representing in a small scale the World's Fair's Court of Honor. These new structures also emulated the fair buildings of a decade earlier because they were rendered in the Beaux Arts Style, and had classical ornamentation molded into the surface of the building material.

The building material selected for nearly all of the new park buildings was exposed aggregate concrete. From this material, which was also known as "marblecrete" or "popcorn concrete," buildings could be constructed quickly, relatively inexpensively, and ornamentation could be molded directly into facades. Although the buildings relied on classical details, the material allows for a visible expression of the small pieces of aggregate, and the rough-cast character required that details be rendered in a simplified vocabulary devoid of intricacies.

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<sup>10</sup> "Chicago Parks and Their Landscape Architecture," *Architectural Record*, v. 24, July, 1908, 26.

<sup>11</sup> Henry G. Foreman, "Chicago's New Park Service," *Century*, v. 69, February, 1905, 610-20.

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The Olmsted Brothers began developing the landscape plans for the new system of parks in December of 1903, several months before D.H. Burnham & Company initiated architectural designs in the spring of 1904. An early sketch for Park No. 13 (Palmer Park) by John Charles Olmsted dated December 30, 1903,<sup>12</sup> placed the field house complex in one corner of the park on a diagonal axis with the sunken playfield that was surrounded by an oval path. This scheme was followed by the Preliminary Plan for Park No. 13, dated January 29, 1904,<sup>13</sup> which had a similar layout, with the field house complex on the northwest corner of the park facing a broad oval-shaped playfield. In the southeast corner the Olmsted Brothers placed an expansive wading pool that was circular in plan. The design included a large bandstand at the corner with a semi-circular pergola edging the enormous wading pool.

The Olmsted Brothers had stated that “the imitation of natural scenery in the form of irregular ornamental lakes, undulating lawns and informal plantations,” would be artificial-looking and inappropriate for parks of “twenty to forty or even sixty acres.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the Olmsted Brothers generally relied on formal design tenets for the preliminary plan of Park No. 13 (Palmer Park), which was just over forty acres. The formal elements include a symmetrical layout placed on the diagonal axis, the monumental circular water feature, and a series of outdoor rooms edged by straight or oval paths. The plan shows most of the paths lined with straight rows of formally planted trees, sometimes with understory shrub masses.

On February 27, 1904, the South Park Commissioners approved the preliminary plan of Park No. 13 with the recommendation that certain revisions be made. These included relocating the building to face south or west and modifying the pergola and wading pool.<sup>15</sup> The Olmsted Brothers revised plan for Park No. 13 was approved by the South Park Commissioners on May 11, 1904.<sup>16</sup> Plans for the park’s buildings soon proceeded.

Palmer Park’s architectural complex included two major buildings, a swimming pool, and small boiler room building. The entire complex was located on the north side of the park. The largest building housed the assembly hall, club rooms, and women’s gymnasium. The men’s gymnasium was located in a smaller building. The two structures were meant to be joined with an open pergola. This pergola, however, was never built.

Edward Bennett appeared before the South Park Commissioners and submitted preliminary plans for Park No. 13 (Palmer Park) on June 15, 1904. The commissioners approved the plans and instructed the

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<sup>12</sup> Olmsted Brothers Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division.

<sup>13</sup> Chicago Park District Special Collections.

<sup>14</sup> Correspondence from Olmsted Brothers to Henry G. Foreman, President of the South Park Commission. December 7, 1903, 11, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division.

<sup>15</sup> Minutes of the South Park Commission Board of Commissioners, February 27, 1904, v. 8, p.15.

<sup>16</sup> Minutes of the South Park Commission Board of Commissioners May 11, 1904, v. 8, p. 70.

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architects to prepare detailed plans and specifications providing for the construction of the buildings “in either brick or cement.”<sup>17</sup> Contracts for the construction of the Palmer Park buildings were awarded on Sept. 7, 1904.<sup>18</sup>

Palmer Park’s construction was completed in August of 1905. By the end of September the first ten of the new parks had opened to the public. These included: Cornell Square, Armour Square, Davis Square, Mark White Square (now McGuane Park), Russell Square, Bessemer Park, Sherman Park, Ogden Park, Hamilton Park, and Palmer Park.

The new parks provided an array of services and facilities for their surrounding communities including English lessons, vocational training, inexpensive hot meals, and public bathing. The parks had club rooms and auditoriums, and several of them included branches of the Chicago Public Library. Foster and the commissioners believed that the new park facilities would help educate and shape the character and morals of the immigrants residing in the surrounding communities. In a speech made on Labor Day of 1904, while the construction of most of the field house complexes had just commenced, South Park Commission President Henry G. Foreman believed that

local patriotism would be developed by neighborhood gatherings. I believe that the young and women would find healthful recreation in club life, if they were provided with a place for meetings; and that such club life would keep them from other things that are distinctly harmful. As for branches of the public library, they would open an avenue of success for many persons who now feel that advancement in life is closed to them because of the unfavorable environment. They would bring almost to the doors of the people means of acquiring useful knowledge.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to the programs and beautifully-designed facilities, the commissioners intended to inspire and educate area residents by selecting park names related to community history or important figures in Chicago or national history.

The South Park Commissioners named Park No. 13 in honor of Potter Palmer (1826 – 1902), one of Chicago’s most successful and influential merchants. Having settled in here in 1852, Palmer opened a dry goods store focusing on customer service by accepting returns, refunds, exchanges, and even

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<sup>17</sup> Minutes of the South Park Commission Board of Commissioners, June 15, 1904, v. 8, p. 100.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, September 7, 1904, 187.

<sup>19</sup> Henry G. Foreman, “Recreation Needs of Chicago,” Address at Morgan Park on Morgan Park Day (Labor Day), Sept. 5, 1904, 7.

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allowing customers to bring potential purchases home for prior inspection. Palmer went on to develop State Street as Chicago's downtown retail district by purchasing a mile of frontage, widening the street, and constructing the "finest commercial buildings Chicago had seen."<sup>20</sup> After his buildings were destroyed by the Great Fire of 1871, an insurance company gave Palmer a \$1.7 million loan to rebuild. At that time, this was the largest loan ever made to an individual.<sup>21</sup> Palmer served on the South Park Board of Commissioners during its early period from 1871 to 1873.

The South Park Commissioners dedicated Palmer Park on October 9, 1905. Ceremonies included an open air concert by the Pullman Band and a display of fireworks. South Park Commission President Henry G. Foreman made an address to an audience of 2000.<sup>22</sup> Other speakers included Senator Albert Clark, Alderman Ernest Bihl, Congressman James R. Mann, Col. Frank O. Lowden, and Bertha Honoré Palmer, Potter Palmer's widow. The events were co-sponsored by the local business men's association.<sup>23</sup>

Along with the other nine new parks that were completed in 1905, Palmer Park proved to be an immediate success. By the end of the year of 1906, Palmer Park's facilities had an annual attendance of 535,664. The combined annual attendance of all of the branch libraries in the new neighborhood parks totaled more the 600,000; the lunch-rooms collectively had served over 425,000 meals; the bathing facilities had been used more than 800,000 times, and in total the ten new parks had served more than 5 million people in congested south side districts.<sup>24</sup> In addition to the regular use of the facilities, the parks provided special programs such as lectures on travel, art, science, and public health.

It was quickly apparent that the new south park prototype would soon provide a national model for park development. The Olmsted Brothers promoted the concept through city planning groups and conferences. Daniel H. Burnham and Edward Bennett incorporated the concept in their 1905 San Francisco Plan, "and in the 1907 St. Louis City Plan, the published report of which contained illustrations of Chicago's small parks."<sup>25</sup> Historian Joan Draper, in documenting how quickly and

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<sup>20</sup> *Annual Report of the South Park Commissioners for the Fiscal Year 1904*, Chicago: 1905, 77.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>22</sup> Breen, Daniel, ed. *Historical Register of the Twenty-two Superseded Parks Districts*, Chicago: Works Progress Administration and the Chicago Park District, 1941, 377.

<sup>23</sup> "Park in Pullman Dedicated: New Pleasure Ground Opened Formally by Business Men's Association of the Suburb," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 10, 1905.

<sup>24</sup> *Annual Report of the South Park Commissioners for the Fiscal Year 1906*, Chicago: 1907, 59-61.

<sup>25</sup> Joan E. Draper, "Park Planning in Chicago: Art and Science. The South Park District's Small Parks of 1902-1905 and Park Planning in the United States," *Planning the Twentieth Century American City*, Christopher Silver and Mary Corbin Sies, eds, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, 102.

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profusely information on Chicago's new south side parks was disseminated, wrote that

the widely disseminated 1909 Plan of Chicago included a site plan of the largest of the new parks, Sherman Park, along with photographs of two others. Illustrations of "typical examples," from the South Side of Chicago, usually Davis or Armour Square soon appeared in books about park design aimed at professionals.<sup>26</sup>

Park administrators, social reformers, and advocates of the playground movement throughout the nation also became well acquainted with the new parks when they attended the Playground Association of America's first annual conference, which took place in Chicago in the summer of 1907.

In 1907, the South End Business Men's Association asked the South Park Commissioners to consider enlarging Palmer Park by purchasing an additional thirteen acres of property along the eastern boundary of the park.<sup>27</sup> After the commissioners failed to take action, a delegation of community organizations appeared before the commissioners in the fall of 1910, urging the expansion of Palmer Park by an additional eighteen acres on the east and requesting the creation of a boulevard to connect with the park.<sup>28</sup> A couple of months later, Superintendent Foster recommended that the expansion request be denied suggesting that it was better to create a larger number of "small parks scattered about in a community, than to have only a few of a large area."<sup>29</sup>

Although the commissioners did not increase the size of the property, Palmer Park continued to provide the surrounding community with many valuable recreational, educational, and social services over the decades. Team sports have been popular throughout the history of the park. Soccer was played in the park as early as 1907. In 1915 Palmer Park's the ninety- pound south parks soccer champions challenged teams of similar weight for the Chicago title.<sup>30</sup> Baseball and basketball have always been played in Palmer Park as well. In 1916 the Palmer Park 125-pounders "won the basketball title of the south parks in their division by drubbing Sherman's, 24 to 7."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Minutes of the South Park Commission Board of Commissioners, Oct. 16, 1907, v. 10, .313.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, Oct. 19, 1910, v. 14, 263.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, December 19, 1910, v. 15, 76.

<sup>30</sup> "Sporting News Notes," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 28, 1915, 8.

<sup>31</sup> "Palmer Park takes Title," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 23, 1916, 10.

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Other facilities in Palmer Park that were well-used by the surrounding community were the reading room, which was used more than 45,000 times during the year of 1909, the children's playground, used more than 80,000 times in 1911, and the swimming pool, used more than 53,000 times in 1912.<sup>32</sup> By 1910, tennis became a popular sport in the park. By the early 1920s, the South Park Commissioners had installed clay courts enclosed with wire fencing.

In the 1920s and 1930s, numerous clubs and organizations held meetings, programs, and events in Palmer Park. Early radios were presented to large crowds of people in 1924 at the "crystal show." Owners of homemade crystal sets were encouraged to display and demonstrate their radios. The *Chicago Tribune* provided prizes to winners in several categories.<sup>33</sup> Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Campfire Girls were organized in the park. Outside groups such as the Women's Relief Corps and Women's Auxiliary also used the park.<sup>34</sup>

During and after World War I, there were many patriotic programs held in Palmer Park. These include celebrations of Armistice Day, Flag Day, and Memorial Day. In 1922, the South Park Commissioners installed an *American Doughboy* monument in Palmer Park in front of the field house. Donated by the Roseland Post Number 49 of the American Legion, the monument was sculpted by John Paulding. It was one of three doughboy sculptures in Chicago, and one of more than 100 throughout the nation.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, Palmer Park's doughboy was stolen in the early 1980s.

After the stock market crash of 1929, the Great Depression had dire consequences in Chicago. "Only fifty percent of the Chicagoans who had worked in the manufacturing sector in 1927 were still working there in 1933."<sup>36</sup> In the early 1930s, prior to the formation of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which was created in January, 1935, President Roosevelt established a government relief agency known as the Civil Works Administration (CWA) which provided jobs to the unemployed. This program was terminated March 31, 1934. The South Park Commission received funds for several CWA projects conducted in 1933 and early 1934. Among these was a series of three murals painted in Palmer Park by the eminent muralist, James Edwin McBurney.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Report of the South Park Commissioners for a Period of Twelve Months from March 1, 1909 to February 28, 1910, inclusive*, 89, and *Report of the South Park Commissioners for a Period of Twelve Months from March 1, 1911 to Feb 29, 1912, inclusive*, 98, and *Report of the South Park Commissioners for a Period of Twelve Months from March 1, 1912, to Feb. 28, 1913, inclusive*, 58.

<sup>33</sup> "Large Crowds Attend Crystal Show at Park," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 23, 1924, E13.

<sup>34</sup> Marian Lorena Osborn, "The Development of Recreation in the South Park System of Chicago," Unpublished Master's Thesis submitted to The Graduate School of Social Service Administration, The University of Chicago, 1928, 114-15.

<sup>35</sup> For more information on the Spirit of the American Doughboy, see [www.members.tripod.com/doughboy\\_lamp/earlspages](http://www.members.tripod.com/doughboy_lamp/earlspages).

<sup>36</sup> Tracey Deutsch, "Great Depression," *Encyclopedia of Chicago History*, The University of Chicago Press, 2004, 360-61.

<sup>37</sup> *Final Report of Completed, Transferred, or Discontinued Projects*, State Civil Works Administration and Local CWA Cook County, prepared for Federal Civil Works Administration, Project No. 1340, March 31, 1934, Chicago Park District Special Collections.

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Depicting the early history of the region surrounding Palmer Park, the three murals feature a Native American viewing the landscape, French explorers Joliet and Marquette discovering the area, and the area's early Dutch settlers. Born in Lore City, Ohio, James E. McBurney (1868 – 1955) received a degree from Northern Illinois State Teachers and taught penmanship before he decided to go back to school to become an artist. He studied at Pratt Institute of Art in New York for eleven years, as well other art schools including Academies Castellucho and Colarossi in Paris. He also studied landscape painting under renowned artists John Twachtman and Charles H. Davis in Connecticut.<sup>38</sup>

McBurney went on to become an accomplished art teacher, illustrator, and muralist. He was in charge of interior decoration for the Southern Counties Building at the Pan-American Exposition in San Diego, California which took place in 1915.<sup>39</sup> After settling in Chicago, he founded his own art school and received commissions from all over the country. McBurney was especially well known for depicting historical scenes with great accuracy. He and his wife, Alice Bolton Fertig, an English and History teacher, often researched historical themes together. Among some of McBurney's most prominent Chicago murals are those at Woodlawn School, Tilden School and the Woodlawn National Bank. McBurney served as Art Director for the Chicago Park District between 1935 and 1938.

The Chicago Park District was formed in 1934, when the city's twenty-two separate park districts, including the South Park Commission, were consolidated into a single agency. Between 1935 and 1941, the newly-formed Chicago Park District received more than \$82 million in federal funding through the WPA (Works Progress Administration) and PWA (Public Works Administration). State and city funds increased this total to more than \$100 million.<sup>40</sup> Using these funds, the park district made numerous improvements throughout the system, which then included 130 parks with a total of eighty-three field houses and fifty swimming pools.

The Chicago Park District made several improvements to Palmer Park that were funded by the WPA. These included reconditioning the ball fields and clay tennis courts, installing new chain-link fencing around the tennis courts, planting shrubs and trees, laying concrete walks, installing new benches, upgrading the playground, and rehabilitating the interior of the field house. A new maintenance building was also constructed at the service yard on the east side of the park.

During the Depression Era, Palmer Park offered many interesting and fun programs that provided a diversion from the difficulties of the times. In addition to the sports programs that had previously taken

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<sup>38</sup>Shirley Lowry, "Mixes Paint with History in Woodlawn: McBurney Murals Show Famous Events," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 12, 1953, S8.

<sup>39</sup>"James E M'Burney" (obituary) *New York Times*, March 5, 1955, 17.

<sup>40</sup>Julia Sniderman Bachrach, *The City in a Garden: A Photographic History of Chicago's Parks*, Center for American Places, Harrisonburg, VA: 2001, 24.

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place in the park such as swimming, baseball, football, soccer, and archery, the park offered gymnastics, social dancing, fencing, badminton, and arts and crafts including model airplanes, Indian lore, and quilting.

In the Post-World War II era, several major special events took place in Palmer Park. There was an annual water carnival which often had relay and novelty races, canoe tilting, penny scrambles, water ballet, and a closing number in which a swimmer would dive through flames.<sup>41</sup> Some very active clubs met regularly in the park, such as a club that provided bait-casting demonstrations at the circular wading pool, and a camera club that met frequently and held exhibitions in 1950s and 1960s. The Ken-Rose Woman's Club held meetings, luncheons, fashion shows, and other special events on a regular basis. During this period, there were a variety of classes offered in the park such as a golf school, as well as homemaking and art courses including rug-hooking and dress making.<sup>42</sup>

In the 1960s and 1970s, many African American families moved into the Roseland community "escaping the overcrowded areas to the north" and attracted by the opportunity "to buy a home and build a future."<sup>43</sup> Production at the nearby Pullman factory and other area industries began slowing and finally closed in 1982. The loss of jobs caused mortgage foreclosures and decline in the neighborhood. The Chicago Park District made some improvements during this era, including a renovation project for the Palmer Park field house funded by a large federal grant in 1979.<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, some of the improvements, as well as projects undertaken due to security issues, programming changes and other factors have had a negative impact on the park's historic integrity. The park district removed a significant amount of shrubbery and under-story plants to make landscape maintenance easier and to provide better surveillance. Due to problems with Dutch elm disease, the park district removed the elms in the music court and the terrace and replaced them with honey locusts and other more disease-resistant varieties. At the same time, the circular wading pool was filled in and replaced with turf. The children's oval wading pool was replaced by a modern spray pool in 1986.

Despite these changes, Palmer Park retains a good deal of historic fabric. The park's spatial arrangements, walkway system, recessed athletic field, many historic trees, and all of the major buildings remain in tact. Improvements underway include a new water slide, batting cages, and the conservation of the historic murals. Today Palmer Park offers many of the same kinds of programs as were historically offered in the park such as basketball, baseball, swimming, senior's club and an after school program called Park Kids. It is quite evident that today, historic Palmer Park remains a vital part of the surrounding community.

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<sup>41</sup> "Palmer Park to Hold Annual Water Circus," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 31, 1949, SW 14.

<sup>42</sup> "Offer Courses in Palmer Park," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 15, 1966, IND6.

<sup>43</sup> Chicago Fact Book Consortium. *Local Community Fact Book Chicago Metropolitan Area: Based on the 1970 and 1980 Censuses*. University of Illinois at Chicago, 1984, 129.

<sup>44</sup> "Park District gets grant to renovated 7 fieldhouses," *Chicago Tribune*, November 22, 1979 W\_A2.



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South Park Commissioners. Tennis Courts Backstops, Palmer Park. March, 1910.

South Park Commissioners. Palmer Park. Reconstruction of Swimming Pool. May 1, 1923.

South Park Commissioners. Wire Fence Enclosing Tennis Courts, Palmer Park. July, 1923.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic Photographs of Palmer Park, various dates. Chicago Park District Special Collections.

Aerial Photograph. Palmer Park, 2006.



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**Palmer Park, Cook County, Illinois**

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**Geographical Data**

**Verbal Boundary Description**

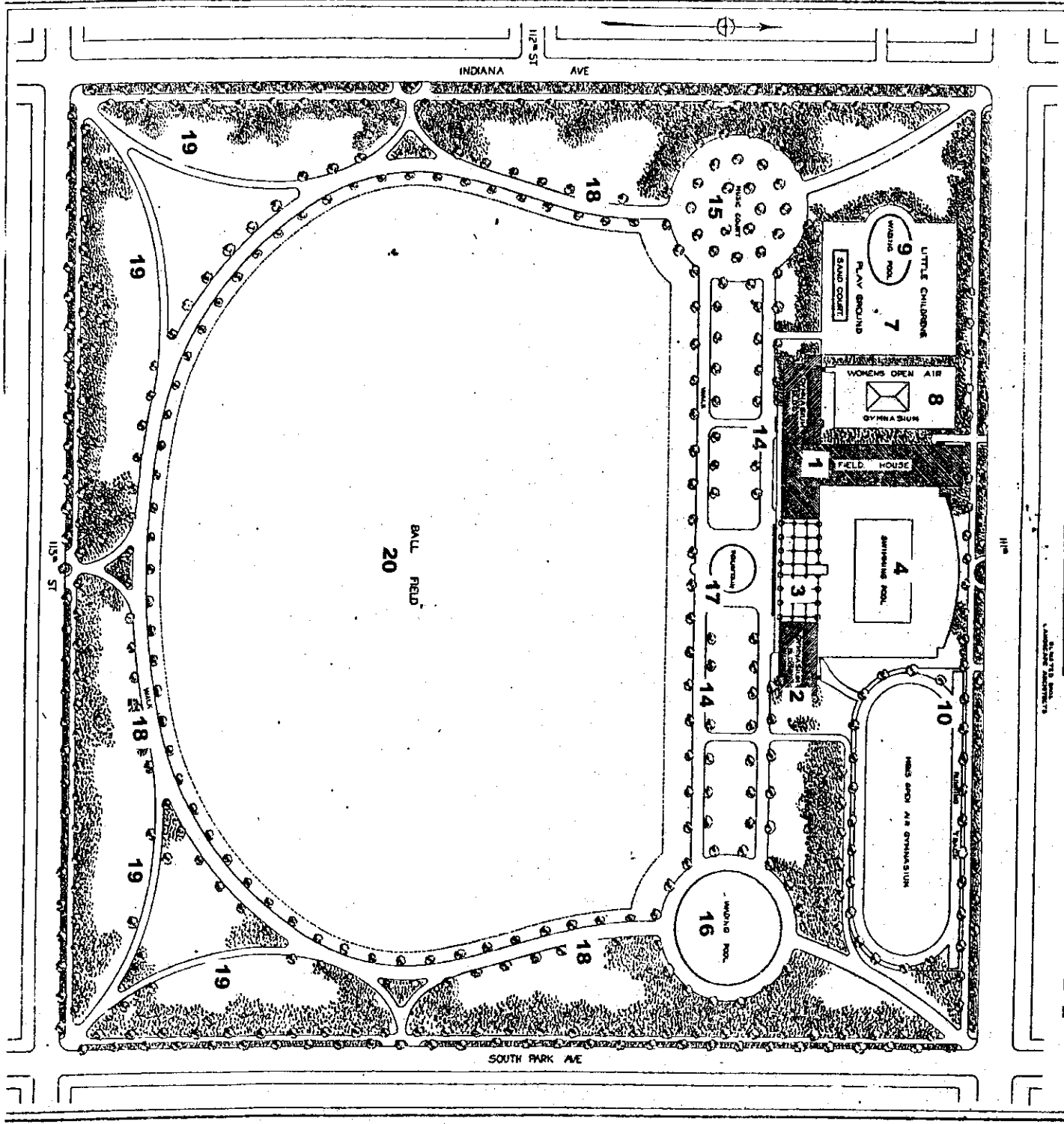
The property is bounded on the north by the south curb-line of East 111th Street, on the south by the north curb-line of East 115<sup>th</sup> Street, on the east by the west curb-line of South Martin Luther King Drive, and on the west by the east curb-line of South Indiana Avenue.

**Boundary Justification**

This is the plot of land historically associated with the park during its period of significance.

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

**A**



INDIANA AVE

112<sup>th</sup> ST

115<sup>th</sup> ST

SOUTH PARK AVE



**PALMER PARK**  
 SOUTH PARK COMMISSIONERS  
 CHICAGO  
 MARCH 1909

CORRECTED *Jim White* ENGR.  
 APPROVED *[Signature]* SUPT

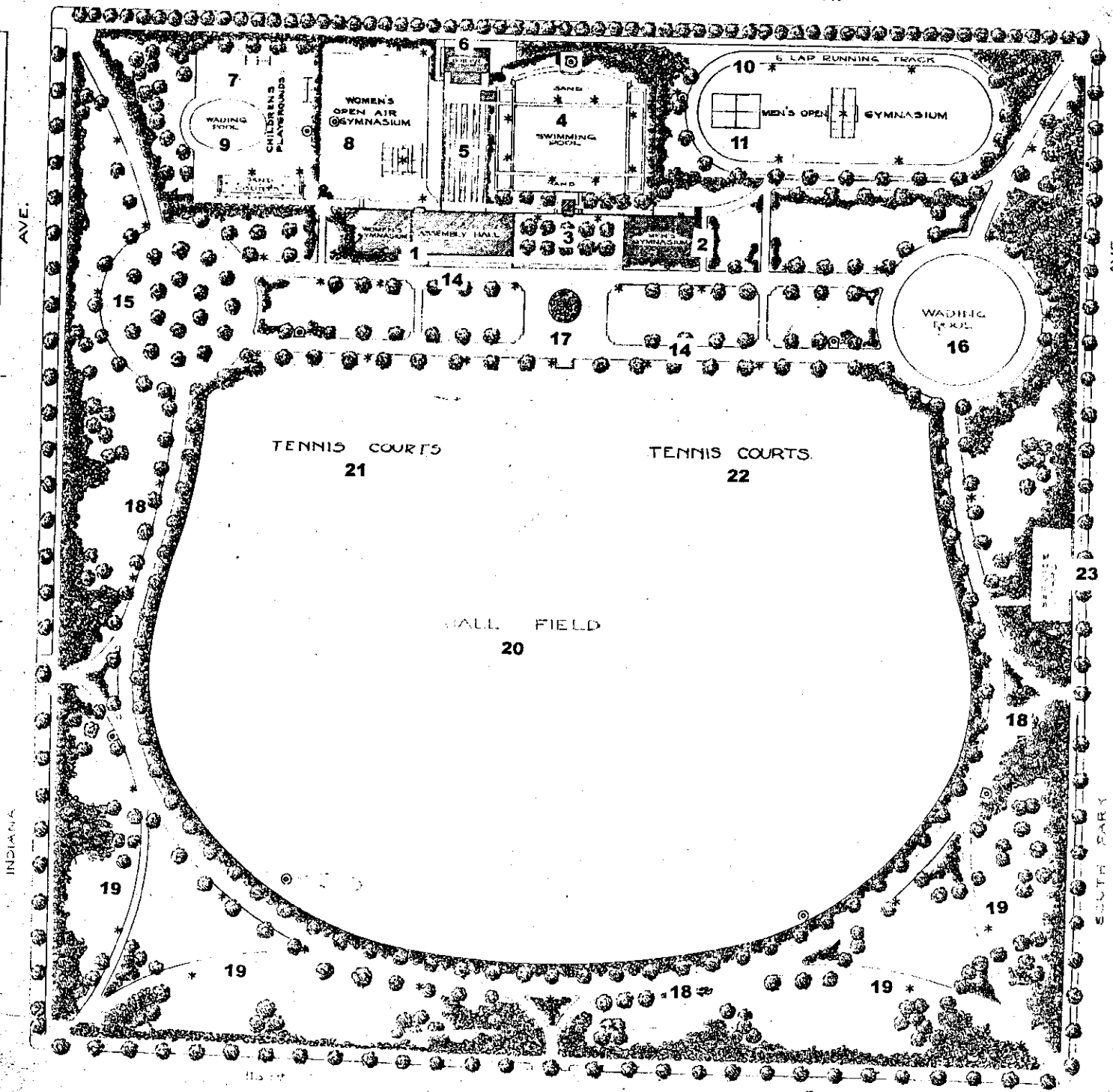
**B**

1112

ST.

INDIANA AVE.

INDIANA AVE.

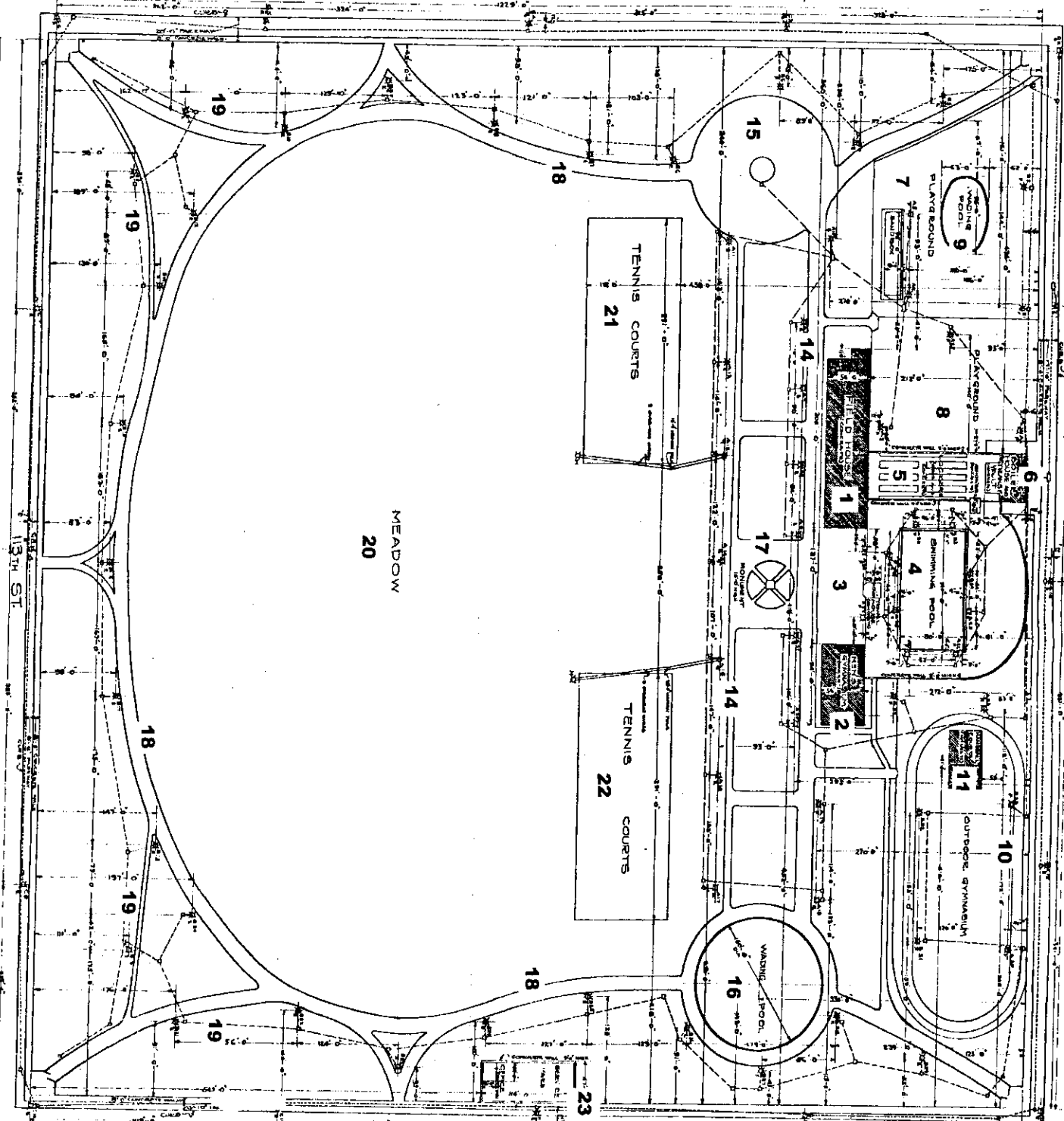


PLANNED BY *[Signature]*  
 R. J. [Signature]



INDIANA AVE.

11TH ST



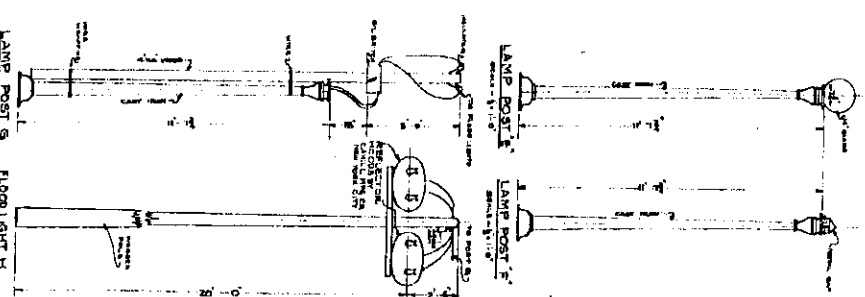
SOUTH PARK AVE.

13TH ST

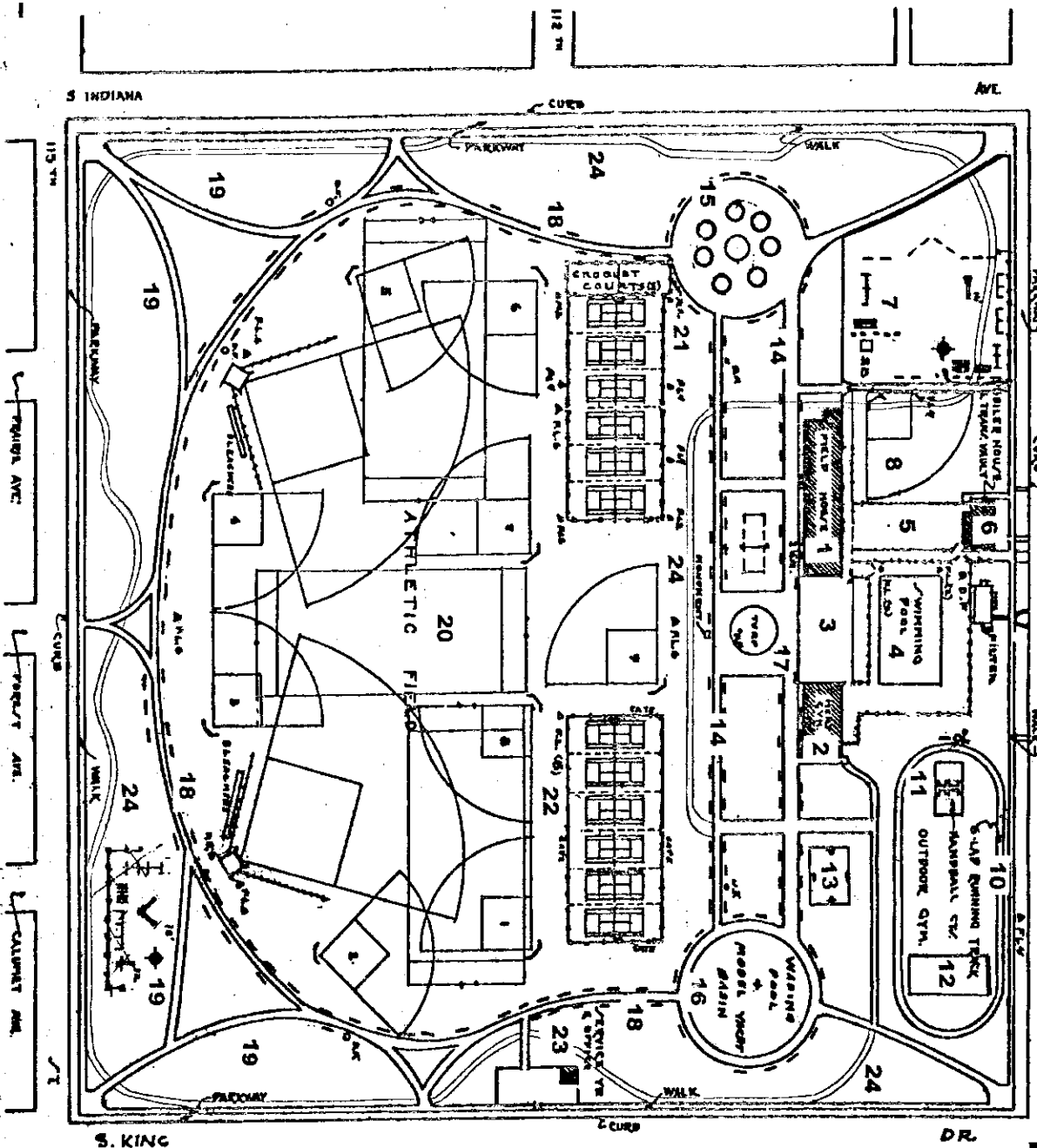
FOREST AVE.

CALUMET AVE.

NOTES:  
 1. LINES IN CIRCLE "C" ARE TO BE DELETED FROM THE FINAL PLAN.  
 2. ALL DIMENSIONS ARE IN FEET AND INCHES.  
 3. ALL DIMENSIONS ARE TO FACE UNLESS OTHERWISE SPECIFIED.  
 4. ALL DIMENSIONS ARE TO FACE UNLESS OTHERWISE SPECIFIED.  
 5. ALL DIMENSIONS ARE TO FACE UNLESS OTHERWISE SPECIFIED.



CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT  
 MECHANICAL DEPARTMENT  
 PALMER PARK  
 PLOT PLAN



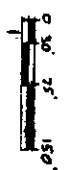
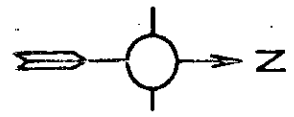
**NOTE.**

LOCATIONS FOR BALL DIAMONDS, COURT AREAS AND OTHER FACILITIES ARE APPROXIMATE ONLY. SKETCHED FROM FIELD INSPECTIONS. NO OFFICIAL DRAWING AVAILABLES.

COMM. NO. 53B  
PARK NO. 13

**PLOT PLAN**  
**PALMER PARK**

CHURCH PARK OFFICE



Ruddell Mill Site,  
Address Restricted,  
Batesville vicinity, 07000434,  
LISTED, 8/28/07

ILLINOIS, COOK COUNTY,  
Community House,  
620 Lincoln Ave.,  
Winnetka, 07000854,  
LISTED, 8/30/07

ILLINOIS, COOK COUNTY,  
Palmer Park,  
201 E. 111th St.,  
Chicago, 07000855,  
LISTED, 8/30/07  
(Chicago Park District MPS)

ILLINOIS, COOK COUNTY,  
Vial, Robert, House,  
7425 S. Wolf Rd.,  
Burr Ridge, 07000853,  
LISTED, 8/31/07

ILLINOIS, ROCK ISLAND COUNTY,  
Moline Downtown Commercial Historic District, Roughly bounded by 12th St. to 18th St., 4th Ave. to  
7th Ave., Moline, 07000856, LISTED, 8/30/07

IOWA, WOODBURY COUNTY,  
Williges Building,  
613-615 Pierce St.,  
Siouz City, 07000850,  
LISTED, 8/31/07

LOUISIANA, ORLEANS PARISH,  
Buildings at 445-447-449 South Rampart,  
445-447-449 S. Rampart,  
New Orleans, 07000857,  
LISTED, 8/30/07

MARYLAND, BALTIMORE COUNTY,  
Goucher College,  
1021 Dulaney Valley Rd.,  
Towson, 07000885,  
LISTED, 8/28/07

MARYLAND, FREDERICK COUNTY,  
St. John's Church at Creagerstown Historic District,  
8619 Blacks Mill Rd.,  
Thurmont vicinity, 07000862,  
LISTED, 8/28/07

MARYLAND, HARFORD COUNTY,  
Graystone Lodge,  
1118 Bel Air Rd.,